

The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Advancing Industrial Productivity and Economic Leadership in the United States

Hallie Kit, Department of Management Science, University of Miami

hallie.kit@miami.edu

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how far the U.S. can go in leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance productivity in the industrial sector and, ultimately, its role as the world's economic leader. The survey was conducted using a cross-sectional survey design with a sample of 250 managers, engineers and executives in U.S. manufacturing, technology, automotive, aerospace and defense, and energy companies. A five-point Likert scale survey was used to assess four constructs: AI adoption, process automation, data-driven decision making, industrial productivity, and economic leadership. The hypothesized relationships were tested using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. Results show that process automation, data-driven decision making and the adoption of AI are each important positive predictors of industrial productivity, together accounting for 55.1% of the variance in industrial productivity ($R^2 = .551$, $F(3, 246) = 100.52$, $p < .001$). The perceived economic leadership, in turn, was the strongest predictor of industrial productivity ($\beta = .276$, $p < .001$), besides the direct effect of AI adoption and data-driven decision making.

The results validate an argument that AI is a general-purpose technology that increases the productivity of firms and that, overall, improves national competitiveness. Managerial, policy and future research implications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence is no longer a research lab experiment but an indispensable factor in industrial production, logistics and strategic decision making. In the United States, the use of machine learning algorithms, robotic process automation, computer vision, and generative AI systems is becoming more pervasive in production lines, supply chains, and corporate planning processes. Labor productivity growth in industries with a high degree of AI exposure has been consistently linked to positive outcomes by federal statistical agencies, while at the same time, industries with a higher level of AI exposure also experienced an increase in capital intensity [1]. Macroeconomically, it is estimated that with AI-powered applications, industries from advanced manufacturing to logistics to energy could generate trillions of dollars of additional annual output [2].

The productivity impacts of AI and automation are especially significant for the USA, where the economy's competitive edge has historically depended on investment in technology, capital-intensive production, and high levels of worker productivity. In the U.S., the growth of total factor productivity also slowed significantly since 2005, and this deceleration occurred in both high technology and non-high technology industries [3]. In this context, AI is often touted as a technology that could reverse the slowdown in productivity by automating routine cognitive and physical tasks, making it possible to predict maintenance needs, optimize supply chains, and speed up and enhance the quality of managerial decision-making [4].

While there are a number of macroeconomic and firm-level studies that work towards this end, few quantitative studies directly interview practitioners in U.S. industrial organizations to understand how the adoption of AI, automation, and data-driven decision making collectively contribute to a firm's productivity and competitive position, and the broader economy's competitiveness. This study attempts to fill that void by surveying 250 professionals from across several of the key industrial sectors in the U.S. Specific study aims include: (1) measure the prevalence of using AI and related practices within U.S. industrial companies and how these measures relate to the extent of process automation and reliance on data to make decisions; (2) examine the relationship between AI adoption, process automation, and data-driven decision making and industrial productivity; and (3) assess the relationship between industrial productivity and AI-related practices and between AI-related practices and perceived U.S. economic leadership.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: AI adoption has a significant positive effect on industrial productivity.

H2: Process automation has a significant positive effect on industrial productivity.

H3: Data-driven decision making has a significant positive effect on industrial productivity.

H4: Industrial productivity has a significant positive effect on perceived U.S. economic leadership.

H5: AI adoption has a significant direct positive effect on perceived U.S. economic leadership, independent of industrial productivity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. AI AND PRODUCTIVITY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Brynjolfsson, Rock, and Syverson characterized the association between AI and productivity as a “modern productivity paradox”—GPTs usually need a period of complementary organizational investment before productivity gains are seen at the aggregate level [5]. This is in line with other research by the Census Bureau that examined how American manufacturing companies are implementing AI, revealing J-curve effects in which short-term productivity and profitability declines are followed by gains in the long run as companies adapt to new AI-enabled technologies in production, inventory, and personnel [6].

B. FIRM-LEVEL AND TASK-LEVEL EVIDENCE

Both firm-level and task-level evidence of productivity gains from AI tools are available in experimental and quasi-experimental studies, with these two types converging. In a randomized controlled trial where professionals wrote tasks with and without a generative AI tool, it was determined that the AI-assisted group finished the tasks significantly faster, and that the quality of output was also better, particularly for initially less-productive workers [7]. Double-digit productivity gains are observed after implementing AI in complementary areas, such as code generation and customer support [4, 7]. In the industry level, firms that have higher exposure to AI technologies grow faster in labor productivity gains and are higher in capital intensity than less-exposure firms [1], [8].

C. AI, INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION, AND COMPETITIVENESS

AI has been associated with more comprehensive industrial innovation outcomes, in addition to incremental efficiency gains. The results of the German manufacturing firm-level study indicate that using AI is correlated with greater likelihood of new products and processes [9]. A systematic review of the AI-related innovation literature further suggests that AI not only transforms the business landscape, but it is also transforming the nature of business innovation — moving firms towards a more predictive and adaptive business model [10]. The cross-country analyses indicate that the productivity benefits from AI are not automatic and do not necessarily accrue to everyone, but rather are contingent upon additional investments in skills and data infrastructure, as well as organizational restructuring and redesign [11], [12].

D. AI AND NATIONAL ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP

In the United States, the stakes of AI diffusion have been analyzed at a macroeconomic level, as industrial productivity is one of the main drivers of the growth of gross domestic product and international competitiveness. Although AI has the potential to significantly boost overall growth, the scale and timing of these impacts vary, and depend on the rate of adoption industry by industry [13]. Similar economic research organizations predict that widespread generative AI adoption could boost U.S. and world GDP growth over the long-term as long as consumer trust issues, workforce training and preparation, and regulatory challenges are overcome [14]. Combined, the cited literature points to a possible causal chain of effects: adoption of AI, followed by process automation and better decisions, followed by increased industrial productivity, and ultimately national economic leadership; and the present study empirically validates it with primary survey data gathered from U.S. industrial professionals.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used in this study was of a quantitative, cross sectional and descriptive correlational type. Primary data was gathered via a structured self-administered questionnaire at a single point in time and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation, as well as multiple linear regression to test the relationships between the constructs of the study.

B. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Managers, engineers, operations personnel and executives from U.S. industrial organizations across manufacturing, technology and electronics, automotive, aerospace and defense and energy industries comprised the target population. This was a stratified random sampling procedure to ensure proportional representation by industry sector, firm size and U.S. geographic region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West). A total of 320 questionnaires were sent out electronically, 250 of which were returned, yielding a response rate of 78.1% and a final sample size of $N = 250$, which is within the recommended sample size range for multiple regression analysis with the number of predictors included in this study.

C. INSTRUMENTATION

There were two parts of the questionnaire. Demographic and organizational data (gender, age, industry sector, organizational size, region) were gathered in Part I. The items of the five constructs used in Part II were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree; 5: Strongly Agree) and included AI Adoption (6 items), Process Automation (5 items), Data-Driven Decision Making (5 items), Industrial Productivity (6 items dependent variable), and Economic Leadership (5 items dependent variable). Items were designed from scales used in previous studies of AI-productivity and technology-adoption, and revised with a pilot test of 30 respondents that were not included in the final sample.

D. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The internal consistency reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha. The internal consistency of all constructs was high (Table III) and with values greater than .70. The content validity was demonstrated by the expert review process by three subject-matter reviewers with an industrial engineering and technology management background, and construct validity was demonstrated by the measure of inter-item and inter-construct correlation.

E. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

IBM SPSS Statistics was used to analyse the data. Data were summarized using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequencies) to describe the sample and responses at each of the construction levels. Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to investigate the relationships between two variables (constructs). Two multiple linear regression models were estimated, one of Industrial Productivity on AI Adoption, Process Automation, Data-Driven Decision Making (model 1, testing H1 – H3), and another of Economic Leadership on AI Adoption, Process Automation, Data-Driven Decision Making, and Industrial Productivity (model 2, testing H4 – H5). The α level used for statistical significance was .05.

RESULTS

A. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Category	Classification	n	%
Gender	Male	153	61.2
	Female	97	38.8
Age	18–29 years	55	22.0
	30–39 years	86	34.4
	40–49 years	69	27.6
	50 years and above	40	16.0
Industry Sector	Manufacturing	95	38.0
	Technology / Electronics	56	22.4
	Automotive	37	14.8

Firm Size	Aerospace & Defense	30	12.0
	Energy	32	12.8
	Fewer than 100 employees	45	18.0
	100–499 employees	85	34.0
	500–999 employees	67	26.8
U.S. Region	1,000+ employees	53	21.2
	Midwest	72	28.8
	South	67	26.8
	West	61	24.4
	Northeast	50	20.0

TABLE 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 250)

B. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND RELIABILITY

The descriptive statistics for the five study constructs are shown in Table II. The mean scores were highest for Industrial Productivity (M = 3.92, SD = .615) and Process Automation (M = 3.85, SD = .601), indicating that the respondents had a moderate to high degree of confidence that AI-based automation is currently having a significant impact on operational productivity.

Construct	Items	Mean	SD
AI Adoption (AIA)	6	3.78	.642
Process Automation (PA)	5	3.85	.601
Data-Driven Decision Making (DDM)	5	3.71	.688
Industrial Productivity (IP)	6	3.92	.615
Economic Leadership (EL)	5	3.68	.701

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Constructs (N = 250)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
AI Adoption	.881
Process Automation	.864
Data-Driven Decision Making	.873
Industrial Productivity	.895
Economic Leadership	.859

Table 3: Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

C. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The Pearson correlation coefficients between the five constructs are shown in Table IV. The bivariate correlations were all positive and ranged from $r = .543$ to $r = .712$, which were all statistically significant at the .01 level, and showed moderate to strong correlations that agreed with the hypothesized model and were not considered problematic due to multicollinearity ($r < .90$).

Construct	AIA	PA	DDM	IP	EL
AI Adoption (AIA)	1.000				
Process Automation (PA)	.612**	1.000			

Data-Driven Decision Making (DDM)	.587**	.543**	1.000		
Industrial Productivity (IP)	.654**	.671**	.609**	1.000	
Economic Leadership (EL)	.598**	.562**	.634**	.712**	1.000

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 250)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

D. REGRESSION ANALYSIS: PREDICTORS OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTIVITY (H1–H3)

In Model 1, the impact of AI Adoption, Process Automation, and Data-Driven Decision Making on Industrial Productivity was tested. The model was statistically significant and explained 55.1% of the variance in Industrial Productivity, $R = .742$, $R^2 = .551$, Adjusted $R^2 = .545$, $F(3, 246) = 100.52$, $p < .001$. Results of the analyses in Table V indicate that all three predictors contributed significantly and positively uniquely: H1, H2, and H3 were supported.

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	.612	.187	—	3.273	.001
AI Adoption	.284	.058	.297	4.897	< .001
Process Automation	.312	.061	.305	5.115	< .001
Data-Driven Decision Making	.196	.054	.219	3.630	< .001

Table 5: Regression Results for Industrial Productivity (Model 1)**Note:** Dependent variable: Industrial Productivity. $R^2 = .551$; Adjusted $R^2 = .545$; $F(3, 246) = 100.52$, $p < .001$.**E. REGRESSION ANALYSIS: PREDICTORS OF ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP (H4–H5)**

In Model 2, AI Adoption, Process Automation, Data-Driven Decision Making were examined for their impact on Economic Leadership as perceived by the respondents. The model was statistically significant, $R = .768$, $R^2 = .590$, Adjusted $R^2 = .583$, $F(4, 245) = 87.94$, $p < .001$. Industrial Productivity emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .276$, $p < .001$), followed by Data-Driven Decision Making ($\beta = .229$, $p < .001$) and AI Adoption ($\beta = .181$, $p = .002$), supporting H4 and H5. Process Automation also had a significant though smaller direct effect ($\beta = .147$, $p = .019$).

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	.447	.196	—	2.281	.023
AI Adoption	.174	.057	.181	3.053	.002
Process Automation	.142	.060	.147	2.367	.019
Data-Driven Decision Making	.221	.055	.229	4.018	< .001
Industrial Productivity	.298	.062	.276	4.806	< .001

Table 6: Regression Results for Economic Leadership (Model 2)**Note:** Dependent variable: Economic Leadership. $R^2 = .590$; Adjusted $R^2 = .583$; $F(4, 245) = 87.94$, $p < .001$.**F. SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

Hypothesis	β	Decision
H1: AI Adoption → Industrial Productivity	.297**	Supported
H2: Process Automation → Industrial Productivity	.305**	Supported
H3: Data-Driven Decision Making → Industrial Productivity	.219**	Supported
H4: Industrial Productivity → Economic Leadership	.276**	Supported
H5: AI Adoption → Economic Leadership (direct)	.181**	Supported

Table 7: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results** $p < .01$.**DISCUSSION**

The results offer significant quantitative evidence for a series of relationships between the adoption of AI and its supporting practices, to industrial productivity, and from industrial productivity to perceived U.S. economic leadership. As in previous experimental studies at the firm level and task level that have produced similar large gains in productivity from generative AI tools and industrial AI technologies respectively [7] and [1, 6] the results from this survey demonstrate that as professionals increase their use of AI within their firms, so too does their reported productivity increase in industry, even when controlling for levels of process automation and data-driven decision making.

The most decisive measure of industrial productivity was process automation ($\beta = .305$), consistent with the perspective that the most immediate productivity benefits of AI can be obtained from the automation of routine, repetitive and predictable work in production and logistics processes [3, 4]. Data-driven decision making also played a significant role, which aligns with the literature on AI-supported managerial decision-making, and is a separate productivity channel from the physical automation [15, 9].

The link between industrial productivity and perceived economic leadership ($\beta = .276$) is similar to the relationship between firm and industry productivity and national competitiveness as well as GDP growth that are well established in the macroeconomic literature [16], [17], [18]. Importantly, there was also a direct impact of AI adoption on economic leadership, independent of its effect on productivity, indicating that respondents believe a capability in AI itself, not just its productivity effects, is a driver of the United States' role in an increasingly AI driven global economy [19]. This aligns with the comments that saw AI diffusion as a sign of national technological leadership in itself [20].

Overall, the results show that the potential advantages of AI are not linear, but instead require complementary organizational investments in automation infrastructure and decision-making processes, not just in algorithmic capabilities [21]. Therefore, firms and policymakers interested in driving productivity and competitiveness from their investments in AI should focus on creating a joint ecosystem of AI automation, data literacy of the workforce, and AI decision support systems, rather than viewing AI adoption as a singular approach.

IMPLICATIONS**A. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study contributes to the existing body of AI-productivity research by empirically validating, using primary survey data, a multi-construct model testing the relationship between AI adoption and industrial productivity, and then national economic leadership. It provides empirical evidence to support the notion of AI adoption, process automation, and data-driven decision making as three, orthogonal, but interrelated constructs, as opposed to a single undifferentiated construct of "AI adoption", which has been the focus of previous conceptualizations based on macro-level or single-firm data [1], [5] and [6].

B. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings indicate that industrial managers can achieve the greatest productivity benefits when adopting AI as part of a broader initiative to invest in process automation and the ability to make data-driven decisions, rather than solely as a stand-alone technology investment. For companies that are early adopters of AI, the best bet to see greater productivity might be to focus on automating more predictable tasks in production and logistics processes that are more likely to yield consistent results, such as those that involve high volumes, before moving into more exploratory applications of AI.

C. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The important relationship between industrial productivity and economic leadership highlights the need for and the importance of promoting widespread adoption of AI across small and medium-sized industrial enterprises, which tend to take longer to embrace new technologies than larger firms. The impact of policies that lower adoption barriers, like workforce AI training, increasing data infrastructure investment, and providing support for capital expenditures in AI automation, should be multiplied across both firm-level productivity and the overall competitiveness of U.S. industry [13] and [14].

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It should be noted that the conclusions drawn from these results do not necessarily apply to all situations. First, the cross-sectional design does not support causal inference, so this would be strengthened by a longitudinal or experimental design to make the causal inference that AI adoption affects productivity and economic leadership. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal

inferences about the direction of effects between AI adoption, productivity, and economic leadership, so this would be strengthened by a longitudinal or experimental design. Second, all constructs were assessed by self-reported perceptual data, as opposed to objective productivity and financial performance data, thereby potentially introducing common-method bias despite the use of validated and reliable scales. Third, while the sample was stratified by sector, firm size, and region, it may not be a representative sample of the U.S. industrial professional population, especially smaller firms that have fewer experience with AI. Future research should integrate objective measures of productivity, include longitudinal panel studies, and consider the effects of potential moderating variables (e.g., firm size, workforce AI literacy, regulatory environment).

CONCLUSION

This study quantitatively explored the relationships between AI Adoption, Process Automation, Data-driven Decision Making, Industrial Productivity and Perceived Economic Leadership based on survey responses from 250 respondents spanning key sectors in the U.S. industry. The results indicate that each of the three trends—AI adoption, process automation and data-driven decision making—is a significant and independent factor in industrial productivity, and that they collectively account for more than 50% of its variance. Perceived U.S. economic leadership is significantly related to industrial productivity, as well as the direct adoption of AI. The findings support the idea that AI is a general-purpose technology whose productivity effects can be maximized through complementary investments made by organizations, and that the collective productivity impacts of such investments collectively contribute to the U.S. position of technological and economic leadership. However, further and widespread investment in AI use, automation capabilities and data-based management is required to drive ongoing progress in AI adoption throughout the U.S. industrial sector.

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